CLAIMS

We claim:

1   1.   A computer-implemented method of conducting an auction comprising:

2   generating a group of similar goods or services from a database

3   containing a plurality of goods or services that have been pre-selected by one or

4   more consumers;

5   providing data regarding said group of similar goods or services to one or

6   more vendors;

7   accepting bids for the provision of said goods or services from one or

8   more of said vendors on said group of similar goods or services; and

9   determining the optimum bid and the vendor which supplied said optimum

10 bid.

    2.   The method of claim 1 further comprising:

         notifying said consumers of said optimum bid.

1   3.   The method of claim 1 wherein said determining step comprises:

2   examining said bids for compliance with one or more rules associated with

3   said group;

4   rejecting bids which fail to comply with said rules; and

5   selecting one of said bids which is compliant and which presents an

6   optimum savings to said consumer.

    4.   The method of claim 3 wherein:

each one of said bids comprises a proposed price; and

wherein said selecting step comprises evaluating said bids based on said proposed price.

5. The method of claim 3 wherein:

each one of said bids comprises a proposed price and a proposed provision of said goods or services; and

wherein said selecting step comprises evaluating said bids based on said proposed price and said proposed provision of said goods or services.

6. The method of claim 3 wherein said bids may deviate from the specific goods or services in said database.

7. The method of claim 3 wherein said rules comprise restrictions as to deviation from the provision of associated goods or services listed in said database.

8. The method of claim 1 where said plurality of goods or services comprise airline reservations.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein said plurality of goods or services comprise automobile rental reservations.

10.   The method of claim 1 wherein said plurality of goods or services comprise hotel reservations.

1   11.   The method of claim 1 wherein

2   said database comprises a plurality of rows wherein each row represents

3   a consumer's preferences;

4   said generating step comprises:

5   scanning said database to determine rows of goods or services

6   with similar preferences; and

7   placing said rows of similar preferences into a group.

12.   The method of claim 11 wherein an individual row may be placed into a plurality of different groups.

13.   The method of claim 11 wherein rows are considered similar if they differ by less than a predetermined amount.

14.   The method of claim 13 wherein said predetermined amount is defined by a rule associated with each of said rows.

1   15.   An apparatus for conducting an auction comprising:

2   means for generating a group of similar goods or services from a

3   database containing a plurality of goods or services that have been pre-selected

4   by one or more consumers;

5   means for providing data regarding said group of similar goods or services

6   to one or more vendors;

7   means for accepting bids for the provision of said goods or services from

8   one or more of said vendors on said group of similar goods or services; and

9   means for determining the optimum bid and the vendor which supplied

10 said optimum bid.

16.   The apparatus of claim 15 further comprising:

     means for notifying said consumers of said optimum bid.

17.   An apparatus for conducting an auction comprising:

     one or more database systems;

     one or more customer terminals each of said customer terminals being

coupled to at least one of said database systems; and

     a computer system coupled to said one or more database systems.

18.   The apparatus of claim 17 further comprising:

     one or more vendor terminals configured to access said computer system.

19.   The apparatus of claim 17 wherein said computer system comprises means to search and copy data from said database systems.

20.   The apparatus of claim 17 further comprising:

one or more intermediary terminals coupled between one or more of said customer terminals and one or more of said database systems.